# ***Mass Incarceration as a Form of Racialized Social Control***

Socratic Seminar Date:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

# **Directions**: Read the attached excerpt of Michelle Alexander’s *The New Jim Crow* and answer the below questions in preparation for a socratic seminar on Tuesday March 8th. The reading is long, please do not wait until the last minute.

**Essential Questions:** Address the two below essential questions upon completion of article and addressing reading questions.

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| * How did the War on Drugs create the subtext (underlying or implicit meaning) for a new system of racialized social control? * What is the “new Jim Crow”? |

**Reading Questions**: Answer these questions as you go through the reading. Question are in order. Bullet-point format for responses is acceptable.

1. How did conservatives depict civil rights activists and the federal courts that ruled in their favor during the 1950s and 1960s? Why?
2. What two causes does Alexander suggest for the rising crime rates in the 1960s? Why do you think these factors were generally ignored?
3. What conclusion did conservatives attempt to draw from the riots and uprisings of the 1960s? What explanation did civil rights activists give instead?
4. How does Alexander characterize the motivation behind some blacks’ support for a “law and order” approach to fighting crime? What did the conservatives gain from their support? What did the black communities gain?
5. How does Alexander describe the racial politics that followed the civil rights movement? How did the Republican Party seize white resistance to desegregation?
6. Alexander writes, “a disproportionate share of the costs of integration and racial equality had been borne by lower- and lower-middle-class whites, who were suddenly forced to compete on equal terms with blacks for jobs and status and who lived in neighborhoods adjoining black ghettos.” How did the conservative “law and order” rhetoric provide a new racial bribe to lower- and lower-middle-class whites? How did this wedge impact the Democratic Party?
7. Alexander points to Reagan’s presidency as the full development of the Republican revolution and what she later refers to as the “Age of Colorblindness.” According to her analysis, how did racial discourse adapt to the needs and demands of this period?
8. At the time the War on Drugs was launched, less than 2 percent of the American public viewed drugs as the most important issue facing the nation. What steps did the Reagan administration take to justify and garner support for the “war”?
9. What main factors contributed to the destabilization of inner-cites in the 1980s? Where did the War on Drugs fit into this reality?
10. Why do you think Alexander finds it so significant to note the beginning of the War on Drugs preceded the start of the crack epidemic?
11. List three examples of federal action taken under President Reagan once the crack epidemic became a public concern.
12. How did President George H. W. Bush continue the racialized “crackdown on crime” and the War on Drugs while in office?
13. What happened to the War on Drugs and its racial agenda when Democratic President Bill Clinton took office?
14. This excerpt ends with Alexander writing that the New Jim Crow had been born. Based on what you have read so far, why do you think she’s naming the phenomenon of mass incarceration this way?